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THE LONGEST REIGN

M DCCC XCVII

NOTE

This Ode, written to commemorate the completion of the sixtieth year of the reign of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, is printed by order of the Hebdomal Council.

THE LONGEST REIGN

AN ODE

ON THE COMPLETION OF THE SIXTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN

OF

HER MAJESTY QUEEN VICTORIA

BY

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OXFORD

AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

M DCCC XCVII

ἅπανθ' ὁ μακρὸς κἀναρίθμητος χρόνος
φύει τ' ἄδηλα καὶ φανέντα κρύπτεται

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I

TIME with his silent footstep, countless Time,
Brings to each mortal spirit Gain and Loss;
Some, by long sorrows proved, to heights sublime
He raises, and with cleansing fires
Refines their hearts from mean desires,
To make the gold of Virtue pure of dross:
And unto some he gives—less happy lives,
Whose morning promised fair—a dark to-morrow,
Whose fate their fame, whose age their joy survives:
The sun that rose in glory sinks in sorrow.

II

Unblest the King, who reigns
Till Fortune's star, or his own manhood wanes!

The great Plantagenet behold !
Crecy's Victor, perfect Knight :
At Calais see his mercy temper might :
Who, in the brightness of that princely bloom,
Had deemed that Time and History should unfold
A slothful Age, a late unhonoured Tomb?
Or mourn him, third of Brunswick's line,
But first to glory in a Briton's name ;
Mourn him reverend in decline,
Happy, if only pitying Heaven
Had to his conscious soul at parting given
One glimpse triumphant of his country's fame !
Even she, the lion-hearted Queen
Of Tudor's house, whose dauntless mien
Flung back proud Parma's scorn from England's shore,
Albeit her reign passed that meridian blaze,
And marked in downward path so many days
As to the Hebrew King were given of yore—¹
What harvest reaped she from those dying years?
What guerdon gained from Time? Ingratitude and Tears.

¹ A.D. 1588-1603. ² Kings xx. 6.

III

Not like these for Thee hath stealing Age,
Sovereign Lady, not for Thee hath Time,
In the evening of thy pilgrimage,
Dimmed the glory of Thy golden prime :
Other gifts to Thee he brings,
Daughter of a hundred Kings,
In whose happier veins are met
Tudor with Plantagenet ;
And the Roses Red and White
In thy single stem unite ;
And with Scotland's royal blood
Mingles the warm southern flood,
Nursed in regions more benign
Under Alp and Apennine,
And of old, through Azo's self,
Poured from the far off fount of immemorial Guelph !

IV

High in the aërial House of Fame,
Time, with just historic hand,
'Neath every Kingly British name,
Records the fortunes of their land.
Through all the Conqueror's lofty line
Behold him to each reign assign
The titles of their varied fate,
To this 'the wise,' to that 'the great';
And see! he writes 'the longest,' Thine!
An empty boast, if length of days
Should bring no meed of added praise;
But Time, to show Thy fortune doubly blest,
Lifts with a smile his golden style,
And o'er the longest reign inscribes THE BEST.

V

As the young oak, with slender girth
 And clinging root, begins to share
 The virtues of his parent earth,
 And drinks the breath of ambient air;
 Such, Liege Lady, such wast Thou,
 When first upon Thy girlish brow,
 Tender, virginal, and fair,
 The circle of Thy fathers' crown descended;
 So early with Thy inmost being blended
 The weight and burden of the public care:
 As the growing oak each spring
 Adds to his girth a wider ring,
 Till with glad eyes men see him rise
 To shadow all the grateful land;
 So have we seen, O Empress Queen,
 Thy spirit with Thy realms expand.

Lo! as Thy people range from sea to sea,
Their Britain's far circumference farther spreading,
From the firm centre still, mild radiance shedding,
The light of Home and England shines in Thee.
Thee they desire across the western waters,
Thee in the torrid and the tempered zone:
Dost Thou not call them still Thy sons and daughters?
Their joys and sorrows, are not these Thine own?
By Time, by Space, by Law, by Freedom, parted;
By Blood, by Speech, by Thee, kept single-hearted,
One English People still, around an English Throne!

VI

What voices these,
That, on the Eastern and the Western breeze,
Waft Thee, from a hundred climes,
Imperial omens of the coming times,
Proud salutations from a hundred seas?

Voices of the virgin field,
Voices of the new-delved mine,
Voices of Arctic cold and summer shine ;
From where, to win his forest's scanty yield,
Alone the Indian hunter goes
O'er the white wastes of Athabasca's snows ;
Or where the bright-eyed mountaineer,
Listening with enchanted ear,
Hears the far nightingale, and sees the rose
Blush in the golden gardens of Kashmir :
Voices sounding grave debate,
That, from many an infant State,
And mingled congress of free senates, rise,
In mutual trust their powers confederate,
And hail Thee Sovereign under Austral skies :
Voices of dim solitudes,
Where adventurous hearts explore
The shrines that Fear and Fancy veiled of yore,
Pierce the dark womb of deathly woods,
Mount the innavigable floods,

And bid an English harvest smile
Around the fabled springs of mystic Nile :
Voice of the high Britannic Peace,
That speeds the sword of Justice far,
To purge, to punish, to release
From dens of Avarice and War ;
Remove the curse from impious Benin's graves,
Cleanse the foul taint from Niger's crimson waves,
And free the fettered toil of Zanzibar !
These be the Voices that attend the goal,
And cheer the prospect of Thy journeying soul :
As darkened lands below the westering sun
Lift the first hymns that hail his day begun ;
So Youth, and Hope, and Freedom welcome Thee,
Queen of a reign well done, Queen of the times to be !

VII

Hail, Sovereign Power, whose influence distils
The gifts of queenly love like gentle dews,
And, poured at large Thy bounty to diffuse,
Flows where it lists, and blesses whom it wills ;
The lofty soul with inspiration thrills,
Brightening the lowly lot with gracious gleams ;
Full as the fountains in Thy steadfast hills,
Fresh as the water in Thy running streams !
Hail to the spirit that universal seems,
Like Nature's common boon of suns and showers !
Historic well of England's life, and Ours
Who nurse the vestal fire of England's dreams !
Who, in this city grey with domes and towers,
Where Memory round each stone like ivy clings,
Revere the piety of founded dowers,
Record the high benevolence of Kings ;
Where Contemplation spreads her brooding wings

O'er sculptured Cloisters, and high-raftered Halls,
By Rivers gliding under ancient Walls ;
Where all mute voices of material things,
More sweet than music of Romance or Rime,
Tune for the listening soul the old strange tale of Time.

VIII

Crowned with the joys and sorrows of Old Age,
Throned in the centre of Thy Kingdom's cares,
Take this last tribute from Thy heritage,
The gift Thine England sends, Thine Isis bears,
Love, Homage, Reverence, Benediction, Prayers
That, through the grace of Heaven's Almighty Power,
Thy Realms, Thy Joys, Thy Days, may yet increase ;
Then wait with quiet mind the coming hour,
When Cares, and Sorrows, and Old Age shall cease,
And the long reign of Time close in eternal Peace.

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